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ABSTRACT

Developed as part of a high school quinmester unit on approaches to literary criticism, this guide provides the teacher with teaching strategies for an investigation of five major intellectual points of view from which literary works are analyzed and judged. A specific literary work (in novel, poem, short story, or other form) is discussed and analyzed from these various points of view. Areas of approach include moral, psychological, historical, biographical, sociological, and "new" criticism. The range of subject matter covers (1) a definition of literary criticism, (2) the identification and application of most commonly accepted approaches to literary criticism, and (3) the status of literary criticism in the 1970s. The guide is arranged by performance objectives with suggested teaching strategies listed under each objective. Appended is a list of student and teacher resources, including textbooks, references, films, and periodicals. (HOD)

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AUTHORIZED COURSE OF INSTRUCTION FOR THE QUINMESTER PROGRAM

DADE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

LANGUAGE ARTS

Approaches to Literary Criticism

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DIVISION OF INSTRUCTION • 1971

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APPROACHES TO LITERARY CRITICISM

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Language Arts

Written
for the
DIVISION OF INSTRUCTION
Dade County Public Schools
Miami, Florida
1972

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COURSE NUMBER
5114.50
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COURSE TITLE: APPROACHES TO LITERARY CRITICISM

COURSE DESCRIPTION: An investigation of five major intellectual points of view from which literary works are analyzed and judged. A specific literary work (i.e., a novel, poem, short story, or other form) will be discussed and analyzed from these various points of view; unless a work lends itself essentially to a particular approach (e.g., a sociological approach would be used in discussing London's The Call of the Wild). Areas of approach include moral, psychological, historical, biographical, sociological, and "new" criticism (a textual "creeping").

I. PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES

A. After extensive reading and discussion, students will conclude that the literary critic attempts to discern the genesis, structure, and effect of a work of literature.

B. Having read a variety of literature selections, students will identify the points of view from which they might be examined and evaluated.

C. Having generated a list of approaches to literary criticism, students will apply these appropriately to various literary selections.

D. Having experienced the various approaches to literary criticism, students will investigate the state of the art today.

II. COURSE CONTENT

A. Rationale

This course should provide students a double-edged experience: the opportunity to hone their thinking and use of language through acquaintance with the thoughts and words of some of the great critics plus the opportunity to be the critic confronting directly works of literature. To perform well in the role of critic, students must acquire the tools for analyzing and evaluating works of art.

B. Range of subject matter

1. A definition of literary criticism

2. Identification and application of most commonly accepted approaches to literary criticism

3. The status of literary criticism in the 1970's

III. TEACHING STRATEGIES

A. After extensive reading and discussion, students will conclude that the literary critic attempts to discern the genesis, the structure, and the effect of a work of literature.

1. Have students view Why Man Creates (1-30758) as a stimulus to understanding an artist's inspiration.

2. Have students read Virginia Woolf's essay "How Should One Read a Book?" (The English Tradition: Nonfiction). Have them discuss the essay directing their attention to her statement"...few people ask from books what books can give us."

3. Have students read or listen to some of the following selections and hypothesize what events or circumstances may have inspired them. They should do some reality checking of their hypotheses. The following categories are only suggested; students may disagree and undoubtedly will wish to add others.

a. Responses to personal feelings
Dylan Thomas, "Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night"
John Milton, "On His Blindness"
Elizabeth Barrett Browning, "Sonnets from the Portuguese"
Countee Cullen, "Incident"

b. Reactions to public events
Walt Whitman, "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd"
Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Concord Hymn"
Alfred, Lord Tennyson, "Charge of the Light Brigade"
Thomas Hardy, "The Man He Killed"

c. Responses to beauty in nature
A. E. Housman, "Loveliest of Trees"
Gerard Manley Hopkins, "God's Grandeur"
William Butler Yeats, "The Wild Swans at Coole"
Walter de la Mare, "Silver"
Robert Browning, "Song"
Walt Whitman, "A Noiseless Patient Spider"

d. Responses to man's artistry
John Keats, "Ode on a Grecian Urn"
John Keats, "On Seeing the Elgin Marbles"
Claude McKay, "St. Isaac's Church,Petrograd"

e. Responses to religious inspiration
   George Herbert, "The Collar"
   William Blake, "Songs of Innocence"
   T. S. Eliot, "The Hollow Men"
   Alfred, Lord Tennyson, "Flower in the Crannied Wall"

f. Quest for self
   Percy Bysshe Shelley, "Ozymandias"
   Emily Dickinson,"I'm Nobody! Who Are You?"
   Robert Frost, "The Road Not Taken"
   E. A. Robinson, "Richard Cory"

g. Flights of fancy
   Samuel T. Coleridge, "Kubla Khan" (Content)
   Don Lee, "Awareness" (Form)
   Lewis Carroll's "Jabberwocky" (Language)

h. Reflection of cultural heritage
   Countee Cullen, "Heritage"
   James Weldon Johnson, "O Black and Unknown Bards"
   Alfred, Lord Tennyson, "Ulysses"
   W. H. Auden, "Musée Des Beaux Arts"

4. Have a group of students explore writers' "borrowings" from previous sources. Have them inform the class and evaluate the ethics of each situation.

   a. Shakespeare used both Plutarch's Lives and Holinshed's Chronicles
   b. Defoe used Alexander Selkirk's account for Robinson Crusoe
   c. Dickens used Carlyle's History of the French Revolution for background of Tale of Two Cities
   d. Tennyson relied upon Malory's Morte d' Arthur for Idylls of the King
   e. Recent publications like The Memoirs of Chief Red Fox and The Howard Hughes Story

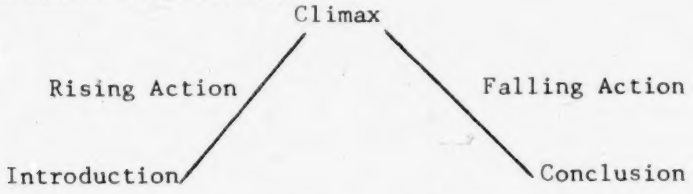
5. Have students view the film What Is Poetry (1-05616) in order to crystallize their feeling for poetry.

6. Lead students in a discussion of Aristotle's theory of organic unity. Have them explore such ideas as his comparing a work of art with a living animal; the author using words with the house-builder using lumber. Interested students might read excerpts from Aristotle's Poetics.

7. Have students test Aristotle's theory of organic unity.

   a. Have students read a short poem, such as Dickinson's "The Soul Selects Her Own Society" explicating it line by line as it is being read.
   b. Have students read a short poem such as Dickinson's "I Never Saw a Moor" in its entirety rereading to clarify any ambiguities.
   c. Have class evaluate which poem had the greater impact and why.

8. Have students analyze the traditional schematic for dramatic construction.



   Have them apply the diagram to the action of (1) a Shakespearean play (2) an Oscar Wilde comedy (3) Thornton Wilder's Our Town and (4) The Rhinoceros or The Sandbox. Have them explore the relationships between content and form.

9. Have students view the film What's in a Play: Dramatic Action (1-4009).

10. Assign students to read and discuss the principles of a good short story as enumerated by Edgar Allan Poe in his "Review of Hawthorne's Twice-Told Tales."

11. Have students view The Story of a Writer (1-31938) to examine the creative process as described by one writer.

12. Divide class into small groups.

   a. Each group should choose a short story writer (e.g. Edgar Allan Poe, O. Henry, Bret Harte, Katherine Mansfield).
   b. Have each group member read at least one short story.
   c. Have groups reconvene and attempt to identify any structural characteristics common to the particular writer.
   d. A representative of each group should report findings to the class.

13. Have students read a short story and view a film based upon it in order to compare the effect of having the same content presented in two different media. Possible choices:

    Poe's "Tell Tale Heart" - Film - 1-05913
    Jackson's "The Lottery"- Film - 1-14286
    Stockton's "The Lady or the Tiger" - Film - 1-14322
    Hawthorne's "Dr. Heidegger's Experiment"- Film - 1-14240

14. Have students view the film: The Novel: What It Is, What It's About, What It Does (1-40059).

15. Have students read or listen to the "Knocking at the Gate Scene" in Macbeth (Act II, Scene 3). Elicit their responses: Is the scene jarring? inappropriate? etc. Assign students to read De Quincey's essay "On the Knocking at the Gate in Macbeth" (The English Tradition: Nonfiction, pp. 193-199). Assign a short essay in which students accept or reject De Quincey's thesis and support their ideas.

16. Have students role-play William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Charles Lamb, and Thomas De Quincey enjoying an evening together after the publication of Lyrical Ballads. (Some background information can be gained by reading essays in The English Tradition: Nonfiction, pp. 179-193.)

17. Have a small group of students study together Matthew Arnold's essay "Sweetness and Light" and present his main points in a symposium.

18. Have two teams of students debate Philip Sidney's definition of the poet as "the monarch of all science." The negative may seek support from Plato's statement that poetry is "divine madness." (Excerpts from Sidney's The Defense of Poesy in The English Tradition: Nonfiction)

19. Have one student plead the cause of the literary critic as a defender of standards. He might choose to role-play Samuel Johnson and use as material the Johnson essays "Modern Fiction" and "Books" from The English Tradition: Nonfiction.

B. Having read a variety of literature selections, students will identify the points of view from which they might be examined and evaluated.

1. Show students a picture of a school. Have them brainstorm how the following people might react.

   a. An entering student
   b. A teacher
   c. A neighbor
   d. An architect
   e. An air-conditioning engineer
   f. A landscape gardener
   g. A dropout
   h. A policeman or security officer
   i. A pusher
   j. A textbook salesman
   k. A new principal
   l. A football coach
   m. A clergyman using the school for services
   n. An alumnus/alumna
   o. The maintenance crew
   p. The custodial staff
   q. The cafeteria staff

   They should conclude that tho' an object actually remains the same, each viewer sees it in light of his experiences.

2. Have students view the film The Eye of the Beholder (1-30023) which demonstrates the relativity of truth in that no two people see the same thing in the same way.

3. Show students an abstract painting or design and have them write down what they see. Insist they must see something. Have them hand in their unsigned reactions. Have a committee compile a list of the marvelous things, seen or unseen by the class.

4. Have students read selections from each of the following groups. After the readings from each category have been completed, ask students questions which will lead them to label the works as to which approach to literary criticism they would apply in analyzing the selection. While it is desirable to reach a class consensus as to the main thrust, meaning is still in the mind of receiver. Divergent thinking should not be stultified.

   Excellent sources for selection for study are the Themes and Writers Series, Singer & Random House Literature Series and Macmillan's Literary Heritage. Short stories and poetry are probably the easiest genres to use.

   The following questions may be helpful.

a. Moral

(1) Does the main character or persona act in accordance with his conscience?
(2) Does he ascribe to the accepted codes of his society?
(3) Does he act in accordance with reader's own code of ethics?
(4) Is he governed by the Judaeo-Christian or other formalized code of behavior?
(5) Do his actions serve either a useful purpose or a higher good?

b. Psychological

(1) Is the central character or persona in revolt against his situation?
(2) Does the central character or persona have an identity problem?
(3) How does the character or persona see himself in relation to other persons?
(4) To what degree does the conflict of the main character or the persona heighten the reader's nervous excitement?

c. Historical

(1) Have students investigate the historical events of the period portrayed in the selection.
(2) Have students study the lives and activities of the historical personages involved.
(3) Have students become familiar with the historical place(s) mentioned.
(4) Have students assess the historical accuracy of "facts" presented. Have them propose reasons for any deviation the author makes from the historical view.
(5) Have students prepare and present a visual-verbal review of the historical personages and events of their book. Added to this should be an overview of the fictional elements contrived by the author.
(6) Have students propose the activities and attitudes of the central character should he be placed in another time and place, such as the latter half of twentieth century America.

d. Biographical

(1) How do the main character's or persona's place of birth and his family influence his thinking?
(2) What formal schooling has he had, and how has he utilized it or rejected it in his life experiences?
(3) What were some of his interests, activities, and occupations throughout his lifetime?
(4) What individuals were influential in shaping his view of life? How did they exert this influence?
(5) What is the author's personal philosophy?
(6) With what places, social conditions, governmental structures, educational organizations, and cultural influences is the individual familiar on a first hand basis?
(7) What vicarious experiences and/or individuals influenced him?
(8) How did the era in which the author lived influence his work?
(9) What are the author's qualifications for writing?
(10) How historically accurate is he? When he deviates from historical facts, why does he do so?
(11) What other works has he written?
(12) What influence--stylistic, thematic, modal, etc.--has the author had on others living during his lifetime? on writers since?

e. Sociological

(1) What role does each group take?
(2) How does each group see itself?
(3) How do groups view one another?
(4) What individuals hold views different from the total group?
(5) How do these differing viewpoints affect the total group?
(6) How does the group role affect and/or influence the view individuals have of themselves?
(7) What social mobility is evident?
(8) What, if any, deviation from the social norm is present in a group or in any of its members?

(9) What pressures are operative on each group?
(10) Are the pressures operative on a group the same as those which are operative on its individual members? If there is a difference, what is it, and why does it exist?

f. The "new" criticism

Implicit in the "new" criticism is the demand that the reader analyze carefully to gain the meaning of the work (its sound, words, symbols, etc.) before adding his own experiences.

(1) Who is the persona? Describe him/her.
(2) Identify his listener(s).
(3) What is the temporal/spatial setting?
(4) What is the main theme?
(5) How does the writer establish his tone?
(6) Analyze the writer's language (diction, semantics).
(7) Discuss the sensory images used.
(8) Identify and interpret literary devices (symbols, figures of speech, paradoxes, allusions, etc.).
(9) Relate any other stylistic devices to the meaning of the work.

5. Have students generate a list of "labels" indicating the approaches they have identified through reading and discussion.

C. Having generated a list of approaches to literary criticism, students will apply these appropriately to various literary selections.

1. Show students an art print. Ask them to write a brief essay criticizing the work from each point of view identified:

a. Moral
b. Psychological
c. Historical
d. Biographical
e. Sociological
f. "New" criticism

2. Have each student select a long work of fiction which he would like to read and criticize. Help students choose appropriate approach for the work. The following categorizations are provided for teacher - student use but need not dictate the critical approach to be taken.

a. Moral

(1) Hawthorne, Nathaniel- The Scarlet Letter.
(2) Hardy, Thomas - Mayor of Casterbridge.
(3) Maugham, Somerset - Of Human Bondage.
(4) Knowles, John - A Separate Peace.
(5) Boulle, Pierre - Face of a Hero.
(6) Wilder, Thornton - The Bridge of San Luis Rey.
(7) Dreiser, Theodore - An American Tragedy.
(8) Dickens, Charles - Bleak House.
(9) Hesse, Hermann - Siddhartha.
(10) Dostoevski, Feodor - Crime and Punishment.

b. Psychological

(1) Ellison, Ralph - Invisible Man.
(2) Conrad, Joseph - The Secret Sharer.
(3) Wilde, Oscar - Picture of Dorian Gray.
(4) James, Henry - Turn of the Screw.
(5) Faulkner, William - The Sound and the Fury.
(6) Baldwin, James - Go Tell It on the Mountain.
(7) Bellamann, Henry - Kings Row.
(8) O'Connor, Flannery - The Violent Bear It Away.
(9) Camus, Albert - The Plague.
(10) Mann, Thomas - The Magic Mountain.

c. Historical

(1) Pasternak, Boris - Dr. Zhivago.
(2) Dumas, Alexandre - Count of Monte Cristo.
(3) Hugo, Victor - Hunchback of Notre Dame.
(4) Dickens, Charles - Tale of Two Cities.
(5) Roberts, Kenneth - Northwest Passage.
(6) Thackeray, William - Vanity Fair.
(7) Mitchell, Margaret - Gone with the Wind.
(8) Tolstoy, Leo - War and Peace.
(9) Bulwer-Lytton, Edward - The Last Days of Pompeii.
(10) Cooper, James Fenimore - Last of the Mohicans.

d. Biographical

(1) Wright, Richard - Native Son.
(2) Joyce, James - Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man.
(3) Dickens, Charles - David Copperfield.
(4) Dostoevski, Feodor - Notes from the Underground.
(5) Solzhenitsyn, Alexander - A Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich.
(6) Cather, Willa - My Antonia.
(7) Fitzgerald, Scott - This Side of Paradise.

(8) Wolfe, Thomas - Look Homeward Angel.
(9) Heller, Joseph - Catch 22.
(10) Hemingway, Ernest - Farewell to Arms.

e. Sociological

(1) Steinbeck, John - Grapes of Wrath.
(2) Dickens, Charles - Hard Times.
(3) Sinclair, Upton - The Jungle.
(4) Dos Passos, John - U.S.A.
(5) London, Jack - Call of the Wild.
(6) Farrell, James - Studs Lonigan.
(7) Forster, E.M. - The Longest Journey.
(8) Hurston, Zora Neale - Their Eyes Were Watching God.
(9) Lewis, Sinclair - Main Street.
(10) Faulkner, William - As I Lay Dying.

3. Have students apply the close reading of the "new" criticism. The following suggestions might guide students' effort.

Fiction:
Joyce, James - Excerpts from Finnegan's Wake.
Kelley, William - Excerpts from A Different Drummer.
Orwell, George - 1984 (Newspeak).
Faulkner,William - "The Bear."

Drama:
Albee,Edward - The Zoo Story.
Ionesco, Eugene - The Rhinoceros.

Poetry by T. S. Eliot, Wallace Stevens, E.E. Cummings.

D. Having experienced the various approaches to literary criticism, students will investigate the state of the art today.

1. Have students view The Critic (1-02127).

2. Acquaint students with such periodicals as:

a. The New York Review of Books
b. The New York Times Book Review Section
c. Harper's
d. Atlantic Monthly
e. Saturday Review
f. Commentary
g. The New Republic
h. Time, Newsweek, Life (Book Review Sections)
i. Sunday Miami Herald Book Review Section
j. World

Discuss the types of book review found in each.

3. Have students read several critiques of one writer to determine the self-chosen role.

   a. Defender of public morals
   b. Arbiter of taste
   c. Molder of political opinions
   d. Determiner of success or failure
   e. God or mortal

4. Have students compare several critical reactions to the same literary selection or theatrical production.

5. Divide class into small groups for the purpose of studying and reporting to the class from an array of significant essays on criticism such as:

   a. Eliot, T.S. - "The Function of Criticism"
   b. Arnold, Mathew - "Literature and Science"
   c. James, Henry - "The Art of Fiction"
   d. Highet, Gilbert - "What Use Is Poetry?"
   e. Richards, I.A. - "A Poetics of Tension"
   f. Woolf, Virginia - "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown"
   g. Brooks, Cleanth - "The Language of Paradox"

6. Have students work with the librarian to find evidence to support or reject Irving Howe's statement "...literary criticism has become fiercely professional...a discipline ...as well as a secondary branch of humane letters."

7. Have several students present a symposium on the "new" criticism: its original intent, its apostles, its values, and its fallacies, and possible interrelationships between the "new" and the traditional approaches.

IV. STUDENT AND TEACHER RESOURCES

A. State-adopted textbooks

The English Tradition: Nonfiction.

Excellent sources for selections for study are the Themes and Writers Series, Singer and Random House Literature Series, and Macmillan's Literary Heritage Series.

B. References

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C. Films

Why Man Creates	1-30758
The Story of a Writer	1-31938
Tell Tale Heart	1-05913
The Lottery	1-14286
The Lady or the Tiger	1-14322
Dr. Heidegger's Experiment	1-14240
The Novel: What It Is, What It's About, What It Does	1-40059
The Eye of the Beholder	1-30023
The Critic	1-02127
What's in a Play: Dramatic Action	1-14009
What Is Poetry	1-05616

D. Periodicals

New York Review of Books

New York Times Book Review Section

Harper's

Atlantic

Saturday Review

Commentary

New Republic

Time

Newsweek

Life

World

Miami Herald Book Review Section